

FACT SHEET: SPYWARE

What is spyware?

Spyware is a program that is installed on a computer (with or without the user's permission) and steals information about you, your computer and web-surfing habits. These malicious programs come in a variety of forms. Some types annoy users with pop-up advertisements. Other spyware programs hide on computers and gather personal information or even allow hackers to hijack PCs.

E-Week magazine reported in their December 9, 2004, issue that spyware "will replace the mass-mailing worm as the biggest nuisance—and security threat—facing businesses in 2005."

Some common spyware categories:

- **Spyware** harvests information about computer users.
- **Adware** displays unwanted advertising on computers and can slow down PCs and servers with a large volume of ads.
- **Keyloggers** can record keystrokes to steal passwords and confidential data.
- **Browser hijackers** manipulate web browser search results and default home pages.
- **Remote Access Trojans (RATs)** give hackers control over a PC, as if the hacker was at your keyboard.
- **Browser Helper Objects (BHOs)** can search all web pages visited by you, and replace banners ads with targeted advertisements, monitor and report your actions and change your homepage.

(Source: Computer Associates Security News and Information, <http://www3.ca.com/securityadvisor/pest/>)

How do you get spyware?

Spyware can be loaded onto a computer with or without your participation. Common ways to get spyware are through web browsing, peer-to-peer file swapping, and installing legitimate software that has spyware bundled into it. For example, adware comes in some free downloads such as screensavers.

WHAT IS WASHINGTON STATE DOING ABOUT SPYWARE?

Representative Jeff Morris (D-Anacortes) has introduced a bill (House Bill 1012, bill text and information at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/billinfo1/dspBillSummary.cfm?billnumber=1012>) to regulate spyware and protect consumers. The bill is similar to legislation passed in California that prohibits any non-authorized user from intentionally copying spyware onto a computer. The bill would place spyware offenders under the consumer protection act which guards against unfair business practices and allows for civil penalties up to \$2000 per violation. (Read about Washington state law regarding consumer protection: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/RCW/index.cfm?fuseaction=chapterdigest&chapter=19.86>) The bill also allows individuals to bring suit, and a provision for the Attorney General's office to prevent future spyware activity.

RESOURCES:

[House Bill 1012 Analysis](#) (PDF)

Computer Associates Security News and Information: <http://www3.ca.com/securityadvisor/pest/>

Microsoft Corporation Spyware/Adware Information: <http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/default.mspx>

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For interviews, please contact Rep. Morris at 360.786.7970 or via e-mail at morris.jeff@leg.wa.gov

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Radio and TV News Directors: To obtain broadcast-quality audio on this issue, or to arrange for TV or radio interviews, please contact House Democratic Caucus Broadcast Coordinator Dan Frizzell at frizzell.dan@leg.wa.gov or 360.786.7208.